

2003 Southeast Kansas Severe Weather Summary Bourbon, Crawford, and Cherokee Counties

For areas of extreme southeast Kansas, severe thunderstorms and tornadoes were frequent during 2003. A total of four tornadoes moved through 47 miles of mainly farm land and small communities of this region. While all three of these counties were affected by tornadoes, around 75 large hail and damaging wind events were also observed. These weather hazards were accountable for approximately 12 million dollars in structural and agricultural loses. Unfortunately, during the May 4th tornado outbreak, six Southeast Kansas citizens lost their lives, while 39 were injured.

The spring severe weather season kicked off on March 12th with the approach of a strong upper level storm system. Line segmented storms fired across eastern Kansas during the afternoon hours, eventually moving to extreme southeast Kansas and western sections of Missouri. Radar sampling indicated that mid level rotation existed with a few of the stronger storms; however, no tornado reports were relayed back to the National Weather Service. Further analysis revealed that these storms acquired strong non-descending rear inflow jets inferred by high radar velocity returns and low reflectivity notches on the storm s rear flanks. The end result was several widespread observations of nickel to golf ball size hail in all three counties.

On April 16th, a very thin line of thunderstorms raked across Crawford and Bourbon Counties. On radar these storms appeared non-severe; however, several observations of estimated wind gusts in excess of 60 mph were relayed to the National Weather Service office in Springfield. Early morning surveys from law enforcement officials revealed that widespread tree damage occurred across rural sections of Crawford and Bourbon Counties. Several street and advertisement signs were knocked over within the city of Fort Scott. Three other minor hail events occurred toward late April with penny to nickel size hail the primary hazards.

Since the beginning of severe weather documentation for this region, severe weather during one month has never been as frequent as May of 2003. This is mainly contributed from the May 4th tornado outbreak. Two long track tornadoes touched down in rural western sections of Crawford and Cherokee Counties that eventually tracked across the entire counties and into Missouri.

The first of these tornadoes entered Crawford County six miles northwest of McCune, Kansas, and lifted two miles north of Liberal, Missouri. The communities of Ringo and Franklin were directly affected by a high end F-4 tornado. Three fatalities occurred near the community of Franklin where everything within this small community was destroyed.

The second of the aforementioned twisters touched down two miles north of Melrose, Kansas, and dissipated three miles east northeast of Carl Junction, Missouri. This F-3 tornado tracked a few miles southeast of Columbus where one fatality occurred near the

small community of Neutral. The tornado then progressed toward eastern sections of Cherokee County where it claimed two more lives near the Kansas Missouri state line. Eventually the tornado crossed into Missouri striking the city of Carl Junction.

One other tornado occurred in May near the city of Fort Scott. A brief touch down was observed over an open prairie three miles south of the city. No damage occurred from this event.

An abnormally low frequency of severe weather occurred over southeast Kansas during the last three weeks of May and all of June. However, July and August made up for the inactive weather with several pulse severe thunderstorm events. The primary hazards with these storms were damaging wind gusts and penny to nickel size hail. A storm that occurred on August 5th spawned a brief F-0 tornado a few miles north of McCune. Ironically this tornado crossed the path of the Crawford County May 4th F-4 tornado. Other than a few trees that were downed in an open field, a National Weather Service storm survey revealed that no structural damage occurred from the tornado. However, several homes and vehicles were severely damaged from baseball size hail.

Severe weather for 2003 concluded over extreme southeast Kansas after a storm tracked across northern Crawford County and into Bourbon County. Law enforcement officials observed penny to nickel size hail.